

CAN-CWIC 2023 Experience

by Kimia Hashemi

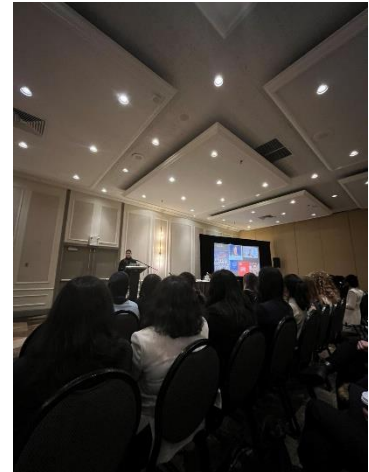
This year's annual Canadian Celebration of Women in Computing Conference started on Friday, October 20th. The registration came first, and I met a few friends from universities all over Canada in the line. All the attendees were mingling, and some were taking pictures in CAN-CWIC's very own photobooth while excitedly waiting for the opening ceremony.

After checking in the hotel room at Delta Marriot Hotel, we enjoyed the dinner that was served. I met a few more friends at the table while waiting for the keynote speech to begin. Tanjulia Akter, who is a brilliant software engineer at Electronic Arts presented her speech "We didn't come this far to only come this far" and shared her inspiring journey of her studies and professional life. The day was wrapped up with some dessert, some more chit chatting, and planning for day two of the conference.



The second day started early with some breakfast, followed by NCWIT Aspirations in Computing National Award Presentation by Wendy Powely, who is the amazing founder of CAN-CWIC. Among the winners were Louise Ho, the Western Canada Affiliate National Winner from Simon Fraser University, who showed a proud presentation of the Women in Computing Science at SFU! After that, four keynote speakers shared their empowering journeys which was my favourite part of all the conference. A quality which they all shared was their courage and curiosity that helped them break any gender barrier and move forward in their career through their trials and triumphs.

After a short break, first of the four parallel sessions began, where I had the tough decision to choose a session among many exciting ones. I attended “Bridging Worlds: The Proxy Product Owner role in orchestrating between Business Vision and IT Realities” session where I learned from Marwa El-Khatib, Scrum Master at Morgan Stanley, all about the business side of a product and the relationship between IT realities and Business vision and the role of a scrum master in bridging these two. The second parallel session was on “Leveraging AI and Emerging Technologies for your Career Journey” where Stefan Shetty, Senior Partner Sales Manager at AWS talked about Generative AI and other emerging technologies and how they will be a major and inseparable part of the future careers in Canada and worldwide. From his own experience, I learned that “Life will be a long journey” and “Your first choice isn’t your last choice”.



The lunch was served at the same time as the career fair, where we all had a chance to chat with representatives from the CAN-CWIC sponsor companies, such as Blackberry, TD, Google, and CGI. After leaving with many insightful advice and some colorful merchandise, I attended another parallel session. Last, but not least, FeiFei Han, an AI Consultant from Deloitte, shared some of her cool NLP projects that she worked on in the last parallel session, “Navigating the AI Era: Preparing for the Future”.



Finally, everyone gathered at the main room for a panel discussion with three wonderful women from academia and industry. They talked about their professional journey and answered some interesting questions and finalized the conference.

My takeaway from CAN-CWIC and the amazing talents and leaders in Tech was:

- Say yes to opportunities that come for you.
- Have relentless resilience.
- Representation matters.
- Build meaningful relationships and a supportive community.

I want to finally thank SFU Women in Computer Science (WiCS) and SFU School of Computing Science who sponsored my trip to this wonderful conference and the friends I made through CAN-CWIC that made this trip many times more joyful and memorable.